



As an innovative Catholic, Vincentian university anchored in the global city of Chicago, DePaul's mission compels us to respond to the most urgent challenges of our society.¹ We offer a highly qualified and socially oriented education to our students and "provide thought leadership in addressing pressing issues of social justice."²

Pope Francis has declared that "the value of our educational practices will be measured not simply by the results of standardized tests, but by the ability to affect the heart of society and to help give birth to a new culture. A different world is possible and we are called to learn how to build it. This will involve every aspect of our humanity, both as individuals and in our communities."³ In the current context of racial, social, economic, environmental, and political tension, several questions emerge as central to the heart of our educational mission: What is social and environmental justice? What does it mean for a society to be just? What is the role of education in promoting social, environmental, and racial justice in and outside of the classroom? What is the role of Catholic higher education in promoting social transformation?

Justice is such a vast and comprising concept. Considering that originally the term was applied only to economic resources, we are amazed by the myriad of elements now included under the wide umbrella of justice. Universal social protection, the distribution of resources, how people are treated, the interplay of privilege and oppression, access to services and opportunities, socio-political participation, safe environmental settings, and issues of power and privilege all play a role in social and environmental justice. The concept of social and environmental justice also has become essential to the anti-racist movement and to broader diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts as well.

Today there is a global understanding that at its most basic level, social and environmental justice includes principles like access, equity, participation, and human rights.⁴ These broad principles are interlinked with fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching, which is based on the dignity of the human person, community and common good, solidarity, care for our planet, our common home, priority of the poor and vulnerable, rights and responsibilities, dignity of work and rights of workers, stewardship, the governance/principle of subsidiarity, and the promotion of peace.⁵ Social and environment justice, as defined by Catholic social teaching, is not a simple human agreement. "What is 'just' is not first determined by the law but by the profound identity of the human being."⁶

1. DePaul University Mission Statement. See: <https://offices.depaul.edu/mission-ministry/about/Pages/mission.aspx>

2. Grounded in Mission: The Plan for DePaul 2024. See: <https://offices.depaul.edu/president/strategic-directions/grounded-in-mission/Pages/default.aspx>

3. Video Message of His Holiness Pope Francis: "Global Compact on Education. Together to Look Beyond," 15 October 2020. See: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201015_videomessaggio-global-compact.html

4. "Four Principles of Social Justice," HumanRightsCareers.com, at: <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/four-principles-of-social-justice/>

5. Genevieve Jordan Laskey, "Catholic Social Teaching 101: Videos and Materials," CRS.org (14 September 2017). See: https://www.crs.org/resource-center/CST-101?gclid=CjwKCAjw_D3BRBIEiwAjVMY7JhZzebrtJ1EPwvXdjkp

YPCtMxVwRxwLCvxUkCXW4R90_GMgdnDo0BoCqLYQAvD_BwE

Just DePaul

From Pope Francis' social teachings, we can infer that we advance social and environmental justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, or disability. According to him "there is no democracy with hunger, nor development with poverty, nor justice in inequality and discrimination," and "a just society is one that promotes and defends the common good."⁷

Considering that DePaul is proud of being a diverse, interfaith, and interconvictional community, we recognize interreligious efforts that have led to the drafting of a Universal Code of Ethics to protect life and our planet. Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration, also known as "The Global Ethic," expressed a shared set of core values found in the teachings of the world's religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions. The Ethic, mostly drafted by Professor Hans Küng in consultation with several hundred leaders and scholars, became an official document of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993 and was updated in 2018. For the first time in history, representatives of all the world's major religions agreed that there are common ethical commitments foundational to each of their traditions. These include:

1. Human beings should be treated humanely.
2. The Golden Rule of Reciprocity.
3. A Commitment to Peace, Non-violence, and Justice. ⁸
4. A Commitment to a Culture of Sustainability and Care for the Earth.

We witness with hope the progress that humanity has made in expanding its understanding of justice and making it central for societies, countries, and our world to thrive. Justice is clearly a human and social need and we hope that it will become a collective aspiration.

Social Justice in the Vincentian Family

Over the past three decades, social and environmental justice for all has slowly become a core concept of our Vincentian global mission. This mission promotes sustainable and just development, systemic change, and human dignity. At the heart of our struggle to promote systemic change we advocate for a society which guarantees fair outcomes for all through dignified employment, universal social protections, social dialogue, fundamental principles, and rights-responsibilities at work, school, and at home. In Saint Vincent and Saint Louise's words and actions, the work of social transformation begins when we stand by and with the most abandoned of our society.

6. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), No. 2, 14 September 1981. See: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html

7. Pope Francis to the summit of Pan-American judges meeting at the Vatican to discuss Social Rights and Franciscan Doctrine. For reference, see Inés San Martín, "Pope Francis says there can be no justice without 'social rights,'" *CruxNow.com* (4 June 2019), at: <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/06/pope-francis-says-there-can-be-no-justice-without-social-rights/>

8. See "Towards a Global Ethic: A Signature Document of The Parliament of the World's Religions," [parliamentofreligions.org](https://parliamentofreligions.org/global-ethic/home), at: <https://parliamentofreligions.org/global-ethic/home>

Just DePaul

At DePaul our Vincentian tradition invites everyone, but particularly students, to seek relationship with those who are victims of systemic injustice through direct service, accompaniment, and service-learning. Today we can say with certainty that if there is no hope for the poor and for victims of systemic injustice there will be no hope for anyone.

As expressed in our mission statement, “Through education and research, the university addresses the great questions of our day, promoting peaceful, just, and equitable solutions to social and environmental challenges.”⁹ For DePaul University, social and environmental justice is more than simply a single subject to be taught. It is a common aspiration of our entire educational community. As we have seen it is a cross-cutting concept in our Catholic and Vincentian identity, and one that should pervade every academic subject, our workplaces, our daily relationships, and our partnerships. We would like to educate our students to look at reality through the lens of social and environmental justice, employing the latest philosophical, religious, pedagogical, theoretical, and practical frameworks as appropriate. We want to prepare them to make decisions that always consider the common good, the dignity of all, and the need to protect our planet.

Social and Environmental Justice at DePaul University

Just DePaul is our collective commitment to advance the agenda of social and environmental justice in each one of us (the personal level), at DePaul University (the institutional level), and in the many communities we serve and partner with locally and globally (the societal level). It is designed to support students, staff, and faculty alike.

Just DePaul provides tools to incorporate social and environmental justice-oriented relationships, workplaces, spirituality and prayer, internal and external partnerships, education, and experiences across the university.

9. DePaul University Mission Statement.

Principles

Just DePaul upholds the following principles as core to the work of social and environmental justice.



Human Dignity: Basic Equity

The Vincentian intuition is that there is dignity in every human story. We uphold the dignity of each person as an equally valuable member of the one and diverse human family. Each person, in their own identities, life circumstances, and abilities should be able to live without fear or shame. We are called to treat all persons with respect and to create a world wherein human rights for all are fully respected and all are empowered to flourish, provided access to cover basic needs, and access to fully participate in social and political decisions. An essential component of DePaul's mission and purpose is to make education accessible to everyone, with special attention to including underserved and underrepresented communities. Our commitment to the Global Compact on Education communicates that we recognize access to quality education as a fundamental human right.¹⁰ At DePaul we believe interdependent diversity will lead to a sustainable humanity and a world in which the dignity of every person is truly recognized and respected. For this reason, a diverse community is the natural environment to prepare students to engage the complexity of the world and to solve the most challenging issues of our day. Therefore, we commit to diversity, equity, and inclusion as an institutional conviction that should be reflected in all processes. We also support human dignity by actively opposing all forces that depreciate the dignity of any person. These include poverty, racism, and white supremacy, and systemic violence or oppression.



Personalism, Compassion, and Relationship

"Vincentian personalism" is a unique articulation of DePaul University's values and the manner in which the mission is lived out, though the broad concept of treating people with dignity without regard to wealth, status, race, ability, gender, sexual orientation, age, or any other aspect of their identity is expressed by many others in different terms. Saints Vincent and Louise were known for treating "each and every person as sacred and unique."¹¹ Vincentian personalism is grounded in that spirit. It also encompasses compassion as well as respect. This is possible when we know one another, when we authentically encounter each other, and when we take the time to see the humanity in others rather than treat them as a statistic, story, task to be completed, or individual to be pitied or revered. A relational aspect is key to everything we do at DePaul and is at the center of all our interactions large and small. Transformation is only possible if we see each other as mutually interdependent human beings who are equally valued. Any hope of social and economic justice must be grounded in this perspective.

10. Ibid.

11. Hugh O'Donnell, C.M., "Apostolic Reflection," *Vincentian Heritage* 16:2 (1995), p. 140. See: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol16/iss2/2/>

Just DePaul



Knowledge and Experience

The Mission of DePaul University, as an academic institution, is based on the best scholarship, research, and framework, and on the lived experience of our faculty, staff, and students, as well as of populations impacted by inequality, poverty, and injustice. We value research that makes connections between “social justice issues” and student learning and achievement.²¹ We will strive to leverage effective practices in “social justice education” and assess their impact on student achievement. With this process we will discover an obvious need for both a shared perspective on the key principles of social and environmental justice education, and a frame through which to assess the strengths and weaknesses of work being undertaken by individual schools and systems. We will continue and expand our understanding of our Vincentian heritage to include direct social and environmental justice education and intervention, efforts which are rooted in effective theory and practice as identified by experts both within and beyond the university community.

21. See, for example, Lenore Reilly Carlisle, Bailey W. Jackson, & Alison George, “Principles of Social Justice Education: The Social Justice Education in Schools Project,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39:1 (2006). Online at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10665680500478809> (Access provided by DePaul University.)